

By Alisha Hyslop

A Closer Look at Programs of Study

PROGRAMS OF STUDY MUST INCORPORATE SECONDARY AND POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION ELEMENTS; INCLUDE ACADEMIC AND CAREER AND TECHNICAL CONTENT IN A COORDINATED, NON-DUPLICATIVE PROGRESSION OF COURSES; AND LEAD TO AN INDUSTRY-RECOGNIZED CREDENTIAL OR CERTIFICATE AT THE POSTSECONDARY LEVEL, OR AN ASSOCIATE OR BACHELOR'S DEGREE.



Perkins Implementation Spotlight Series

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ONE OF THE KEY THEMES OF THE 2006 PERKINS ACT WAS STRENGTHENING CONNECTIONS BETWEEN SECONDARY AND POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION.

While that idea was certainly not new to career and technical education (CTE) programs, there were several new elements in the legislation. The most systemic, and the one that has gotten the most attention, is the new requirement for "programs of study." This requirement provides states, school districts and postsecondary institutions with a new opportunity for true innovation and reform within CTE. Programs of study must incorporate secondary and postsecondary education elements; include academic and career and technical content in a coordinated, non-duplicative progression of courses; and lead to an industry-recognized credential or certificate at the postsecondary level, or an associate or bachelor's degree. As an option, they may also provide students with opportunities for dual or concurrent enrollment.

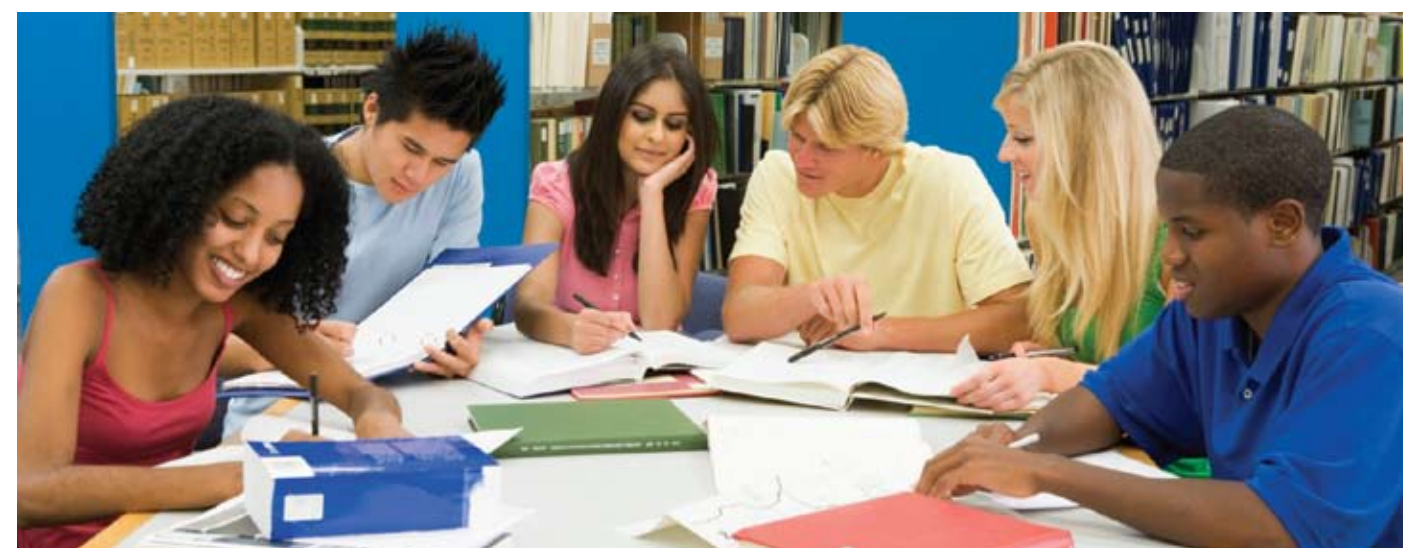
States develop the programs of study in consultation (at varying levels) with local programs, and each local recipient receiving funds under the Act will be required to offer the relevant courses of at least one program of study. Programs of study are very similar to, and build on, positive initiatives already under way in CTE programs around the country, including Tech Prep, career pathways, career academies and career clusters. Programs of study are designed to serve as a seamless education continuum, leading students through secondary and post-

secondary education toward high-wage, high-skill, high-demand careers. In the early stages of Perkins implementation, most of the work related to new programs of study was completed at the state level as decisions were made about development strategies and local requirements. According to the National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education Consortium, states generally went in two directions related to programs of study:

1. States developed state-level models and either mandated local adoption of the programs of study or allowed for their voluntary use.
2. States created guidelines for local development of programs of study that required state approval following specified criteria or guidelines.

In some states, a combination of the two approaches was used, or state-level models are being phased in over time. Following these state decisions, local Perkins grantees dug into their own Perkins implementation efforts in the context of their states' Perkins five-year plans.

In Wisconsin, the state leaned more toward the second approach outlined above, creating sample planning templates for secondary and postsecondary programs to use as a uniform framework for developing complete programs of study, and providing a "Program of Study Implementation Component Guide" and a self-assessment tool for use in implementation. Programs of study will be fully developed by local secondary and postsecondary partnerships using the 16 national



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career clusters and 81 career pathways as a foundation and organizing structure.

In order to facilitate this process, several initiatives have been undertaken at the state level. In August 2008, Wisconsin used some Perkins funding to bring together a group of secondary and postsecondary leaders for a Career Pathways Leadership Certification Workshop provided by the Center for Occupational Research and Development. This in-depth training covered topics such as the emerging economy, how to develop rigorous and relevant curriculum, and the nuts and bolts of programs of study development. It provided a solid jumpstart on program consistency within the state and a cadre of leaders prepared to share information and facilitate program expansion.

The state is also using Perkins reserve funds to work on the development of a career pathways Web site. The mission of the Wisconsin Career Pathways Web Site Project is to partner with educational organizations, government and business/industry to develop a feasibility analysis report with recommendations to create a statewide Career Pathways Web Site to be accessed by Wisconsin citizens in the pursuit of career planning and pathway sharing. The site would also be designed

to share best practices in programs of study among institutions and stakeholders across the state.

At the local level, activities around programs of study are increasing as well. Steve Wilkes, director of the Office of PK-16 Relations at Gateway Technical College, emphasized that while there had already been a strong focus on secondary-postsecondary connections, he has noticed a marked increase. "Secondary programs are all much more involved in working with us to develop career pathways and programs of study." To facilitate this collaboration, the college has held work sessions a few times a year to allow for faculty from both secondary and postsecondary levels to sit down together and work on specific pathway and program alignment. A larger, cluster-level session is held in the summer for work on a broader range of programs of study. Faculty meeting face-to-face can address issues like the best course sequencing and where there might be opportunities for new articulation agreements.

Additional opportunities for collaboration are explored through the important role of business and industry involvement in programs of study partnerships. Within the local consortium led by Gateway Technical College, business advisory

committees from local school districts and the college have been collapsed into unified cluster-level consortium advisory committees. This allows for more cohesive planning and input across the local area, and for more consistent courses and programs.

One of the local partnerships in Wisconsin is between Gateway Technical College and Badger High School. The school has developed 23 programs of study with Gateway, and some cover the transition on to four-year institutions. The Badger High School course guide has even been organized by career pathways so that students can clearly see the connections between high school coursework and their postsecondary education and career goals. Many school districts are moving in this direction as requirements for student individual learning plans are phased in and all students will need access to high-quality programs of study. ■

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